

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Today the House Committee on Rules will meet to formulate a rule on H.R. 438, the "Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act of 2003," a bill that would increase the amount of student loans that may be forgiven for teachers in mathematics, science, and special education. Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31) will testify before the Committee in support of his amendment to allow the inclusion of librarians serving in low-income area public libraries and schools, to the professionals who would benefit from loan forgiveness through H.R. 438.

Public libraries and schools across the nation are experiencing a dire shortage of librarians. It has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified librarians in the face of low salaries. Libraries are now in direct competition with industries needing workers with librarian skills such as those in multimedia technology, database administration, and systems analysis. Additionally, an alarming number of librarians are reaching the age of retirement. It is estimated that 58 percent of professional librarians will reach the age of 65 between 2005 and 2019. Furthermore, in many states, in addition to a college degree, specialized training is necessary to become a school librarian. California requires school librarians to have a media teacher credential in addition to the usual teaching credential. The shortage of qualified librarians is so serious that many schools are asking teachers to leave the classroom to obtain the required training to become school librarians.

"Our schools cannot afford to lose teachers any more than they can afford to be without librarians," said Rep. Becerra. "I think we can do something here today that will encourage more college students to enter the field. My amendment adopts an incentive for students to make the choice to train and serve as librarians in areas where there are concentrations of children with the greatest need for improved educational opportunities."

Current law allows for the cancellation of educational loans for several categories of professionals that serve in low-income areas, such as teachers for Title I schools, special education, and Head Start, as well as members of the armed

services, law enforcement officers, Peace Corps volunteers, medical technicians, and nurses. The American Library Association supports the amendment offered by Representative Becerra.